



Willow Myrtle



An ornamental beauty



The Willow Myrtle tree is used mainly for street plantings and in gardens because of its graceful weeping foliage and spectacular floral display in the spring and summer.

Few species grow under the trees as the leaf litter can suppress understorey species.

The Willow Myrtle growing within the grounds of the old pre-school in our Botanic Garden is a wonderful visual demonstration of its name, "flexuosa" or "full of bends", referring to the zig-zag course of the stem, which changes direction at each leaf node.

Indigenous Uses

The Noongar peoples used the plant leaves as an antiseptic; sapling trunks were used for spear shafts and digging sticks.

Propagation and cultivation

Easy to grow from seed which does not require any pre-treatment prior to sowing. Cuttings are needed for named cultivar.

Family: *Myrtaceae*

Genus: *Agonis*

Botanic name: *Agonis flexuosa*

Agonis comes from the Greek *agon*, "a cluster" for the arrangement of the flowers and fruits; *flexuosa* is Latin for "full of bends" for the zig-zag course of the stem

Also known as: Willow Myrtle, Western Australian Willow, Swan River Peppermint
The Noongar peoples know the tree as *wanil*, *wonnow*, *wonong* or *wannang*

Origin: Endemic to the south-west of Western Australia

Habitat: The most common of the four *Agonis* species in the family *Myrtaceae*, it grows particularly well in sandy soils along the coast, and has been introduced to sub-tropical and temperate areas of the eastern states of Australia.

Description: A small and robust tree, usually less than 10m tall, but may grow to 15m, has fibrous brown bark and weeping pendulous branches. From a distance it looks like the weeping willow.

Leaves are narrow and lance-shaped and reach a length of 150mm and are readily identified by the strong smell of peppermint when they are crushed or torn.



The small white 5-petaled flowers are massed along the branches in spring and summer. The nectar produced by the flowers attracts birds, and the trees are a habitat for possums.

The fruit is a hard sessile capsule, 3–4mm across, with three valves containing many small seeds.

Interesting facts: Willow myrtle is regarded as an environmental weed in Victoria and in those parts of Western Australia that are outside its native range. This species has become established in bushland after escaping from ornamental and amenity plantings.

It is also prone to Myrtle Rust (*Austropuccinia psidii* formerly *Puccinia psidii*), first detected in N.S.W. in 2010. This fungal disease infects plants in the *Myrtaceae* family. Common Australian *Myrtaceae* species include eucalyptus, willow myrtle, turpentine, bottlebrush, paperbark, tea tree and lilly pilly.

ID # 350

Sources:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Agonis_flexuosa

<http://www.anpsa.org.au/a-file.html>

<https://boyanupbotanical.com.au/plant-of-the-month-agonis-flexuosa/>

<https://www.anbg.gov.au/myrtaceae/illustrations.html>